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FLOOR DEBATE

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all nursing faculty have master's degree in nursing, or demonstrate annual progress toward obtaining their advanced degree. Currently, 18 percent of the nursing instructors have the minimum bachelor's degree. The impending loss of nurse educators in the next 10 to 15 years will impact the number of students waiting to enter nursing schools. Last year, UNMC turned away 135 qualified applicants. Creighton University and College of Saint Mary also hit enrollment limits. LB 146, my priority bill of last year, created a loan fund that could be accessed by nurses returning to school for advanced work. In return for the yearly loans of \$5,000 per year for three years, they would agree to teach at an accredited Nebraska school of nursing for two years for each year they received a loan. The yearly amount could be up to \$5,000, with a cap of \$15,000 total. To administer the fund, an additional \$1 fee for RN and LPN license renewals in 2006 and 2007 was included. The act did not request any General Fund appropriations. This was last year. It was approximated that \$25,000 would be generated from the license renewals. That would be to only fund one nurse. It was my hope that grants, donations, and private funding would be secured to fund these loans. I had hoped that would happen over the interim. Unfortunately, it seems like without some state commitment to this project, matching grants are hard to obtain. They didn't even answer my letters. This brings me to LB 962 of this year. The bill was heard in front of the Education Committee and advanced on a vote of 6-1-1. There was proponent testimony from Creighton University, Nebraska Center for Nursing, licensed practical nurses, Nebraska Nurses Association, Nebraska Hospital Association, Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and BryanLGH College of Health Sciences. There was no opposition and no neutral testimony. The practicing nurses who testified emphasized that postbaccalaureate work is usually done while working full-time and tending to family responsibilities. It's a commitment not taken on lightly. Many other healthcare positions pay more without the required master's or doctoral degrees needed for faculty positions. In 2003, the average salary of a master's prepared nurse practitioner working in an emergency room was over \$80,000. In contrast, a master's prepared nurse instructor earned an average of \$60,000, \$20,000 less. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that more than 1 million new and